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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000225

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: DAS MADISON MEETING WITH DEPUTY FM ON CUBA,  
NICARAGUA (CORRECTED COPY OF VATICAN 223)

REF: Vatican 213

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,  
EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

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COPIES OF THAT TELEGRAM.

¶1. (C) Summary. WHA DAS Madison discussed Cuba and Nicaragua in an October 23 conversation with Holy See Deputy FM Parolin. Madison described the USG view of Cuba as it undergoes significant change in the wake of Fidel Castro's illness, our belief that Cuba's future is for Cubans to decide, and our wish to support them in that process. Parolin agreed that Cuba needs more democratic freedoms but expressed caution about trying to move too fast. He also said that while the Catholic Church is working for freedom in Cuba according to its own social doctrine, patience is necessary as it is not clear that increased political freedom -- when it does come -- will be accompanied by a more moral society. Parolin also reiterated the Holy See's intention to try to keep retired Cardinal Obando y Bravo from political participation in Nicaragua. End summary.

¶2. (U) WHA DAS Kirsten Madison, accompanied by DCM, called on Monsignor Pietro Parolin on October 23 to discuss Cuba and Nicaragua. Parolin is the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States (equivalent to deputy foreign minister).

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Cuba

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¶3. (C) Madison described Cuba as undergoing a change from revolutionary leadership to institutions of dictatorship. The regime suffering from internal divisions relating to this change and the accompanying need to share power in new ways. The USG does not expect Fidel to return to power, at least not in his former capacity. Madison told Parolin that the USG wants to engage the world on how to support Cubans: change there is a matter for Cubans to decide, but we can help. The Western Hemisphere is now largely defined by democracies working together in various ways, and Cuba needs to become part of that community. Madison described Cubans as hopeful but fearful, and said repression is currently increasing. It's clear that a dynastic succession won't succeed in bringing stability to Cuba and that in the absence of positive change, the regime will be less stable and more repressive. The USG intention is to help Cubans build capacity and communicate with each other. We want Cubans to be able to seek peaceful change.

¶4. (C) Parolin recalled the 1998 visit to Cuba of the late Pope

John Paul II, in which he said that Cuba and the world needed to open up to each other. However, the situation is very delicate right now. For the Holy See, a peaceful transition is the highest priority to avoid violence and a destabilizing exodus. This transition can be helped by strengthening existing democratic forces. We must be careful, he said, not to provoke the regime into an overreaction, or let outside support for democracy be seen as foreign interference. Parolin observed that the Holy See tends to agree with the positions of Osvaldo Paya.

¶ 15. (C) Parolin wondered how strong the desire for change really is among ordinary Cubans, as opposed to activists. Madison assured him that it was genuine, and illustrated her point with some examples. For instance, whereas normally the US admits 20,000 Cubans legally and almost the same number who arrive through irregular means, migration dropped to zero during the initial period of Fidel's illness; we read this as a sign that Cubans were hopeful of positive change. She also cited a recent Spanish poll indicating that some 80 percent of young Cubans wanted "significant change" in Cuba.

¶ 16. (C) Parolin asked if the popular pressure for political change would lessen if the Cuban economy were to improve; Madison said that in a command society such as Cuba, the socioeconomic situation could not be separated from the political situation. The economy would not improve without a weakening of the government's control over labor, for example. Madison reiterated that the USG wants to look forward, and plan for an emerging Cuba. Our law, policy, and politics all make clear that a change in the USG stance toward Cuba will depend on a positive change in Cuba itself. However, it's not a simplistic requirement that Cuba become a full-fledged democracy overnight; rather, under U.S. law, USG assistance could respond according to the pace of change in Cuba (e.g., release of political prisoners, steps toward elections, etc.). Parolin said this appeared to be a very realistic policy; one should not wait for complete change before doing something to help.

¶ 17. (C) Parolin asked Madison what she thought the role of the Church should be in Cuba. Madison said that would be for the Church to decide, but there is surely a need for Cubans to have spiritual support. Parolin said the Church is always working for the future, for new society, more freedom of worship,

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freedom of the press, etc., according to its own social doctrine. However, the Church must avoid being identified as part of the opposition. The papal nuncio in Havana is very open to Paya, he said, but we need to be patient. In the discussion which followed, Parolin clarified that he does not expect a rapid transition in Cuba. As for the Church itself, events in Eastern Europe in the 1990s suggested that increased political freedom does not necessarily lead to increased piety or Church participation. As the pope had said, everything depends on how you use your freedom. Parolin doubted that Cubans, lacking any religious education for the past two generations, would be morally prepared for the challenge facing them. The new era of freedom, he said, is also a challenge to the Church.

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Nicaragua

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¶ 18. (C) Parolin raised the topic of Nicaragua. Noting that he had spoken with ambassador and DCM on this recently (reftel), he acknowledged that the behavior of retired Cardinal Obando y Bravo was of considerable concern to the Holy See. He again promised that the Holy See would try to get Obando to avoid political involvement. He asked that the USG take care to distinguish between the actions of the cardinal and those of his successor, or those of the Church as a whole. He emphasized the importance of keeping ecclesiastics out of politics on principle.

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Comment

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¶9. (C) Parolin welcomed DAS Madison's visit and listened carefully to her description of the situation in Cuba and the USG position regarding changes in that country. He readily agreed that Cuba needed more freedoms, more economic development, and more democracy. His caution about avoiding violence and uncontrollable refugee flows was clearly apparent, as was the longstanding Holy See preference for a careful, patient, and low-key approach. Parolin's comments about Eastern Europe were especially interesting in this regard, suggesting that the overnight transition to Western-style economies outstripped the ability of Eastern societies to adapt, resulting in high levels of corruption, profiteering, and social vices. The Holy See thus does not expect rapid change in Cuba, and indeed may fear that rapid change may cause a moral decline there. Parolin's attention to Nicaragua (a subject he raised himself) was also welcome, confirming the effectiveness of our earlier approach on this subject.

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